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Nothing Can be Said Without Believing in Absolute Truth

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Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Descartes, Leibniz, Hegel all argued a similar point:¹ It goes like this. Our lives are temporal, our perspective flawed, and our reasoning biased. However, above these human variations and prejudiced inklings there lies a world of pure truth. Call it the *theory of the forms*, mathematics, logic, concepts, pure consciousness, it exists in an abstract space. Close your eyes and imagine a circle: there it is! Flawless, unchanging, eternal. Stand up on a hill and let the wind blow against your body. Look out across the ocean, do you sense that distant, strange longing, as if somehow you are part of something bigger? There it is again!

Several cultures have reached this conclusion: it's pure spirit in the *Upanishads*; the Ancient Egyptians' *Ma'at* or "*divine mirror*";² it's the Aztec *Teotl* or root.³ In Yoruba cosmology, it's the singular "highest beauty" form, in Southern African *Ubuntu* it is the invisible thread that connects us.

Human beings have evolved with this ongoing belief in metaphysics, in a higher reality. It's part of our collective story here on Earth. Some anthropomorphize this belief, others codify it in dogma and ritual. It brings people together but unfortunately also tears us apart.

People who reject this idea of transcendence, the way Nietzsche tried to, tend to reinvent it, sometimes without realizing it, calling it science, or identity, or political conviction. We cannot shirk our metaphysical connection; it goes back at least 60,000 years to the earliest cave paintings. Humans have this need to connect with a greater force that cuts through everything, including death.

Could it all be an illusion? Might it be that in fact there is no such thing as absolute truth? Possibly, but no one has been able to convince me yet, and in trying to convince me they have all followed some absolute belief, some conviction, some *theory* (from the Greek *theoria*, meaning "a looking at, contemplation, or speculation") of God.

To me the question of whether you believe in God or not is a bit like asking someone if they can write a sentence without believing in grammar, or argue a point without believing in logical progression. Even atheists can't escape it, because they believe that there is no God. But to believe that there is or there is not, is to give yourself up to the higher truth of some sort of ultimate reality or the negation of that reality: you believe in being. And what exactly is being?

This is not a logical or ontological argument, it's much more basic, to me in any case; it's inescapable and even obvious. Now the job is what to do with that. What do you do when you look up in the sky and see the sun? What do you do when you contemplate the stars? It is for us humans to act kindly to one another in the face of this metaphysical truth, and not to turn it into bigotry or pettiness.

Footnotes:

- 1) While Plato, St. Augustine, Descartes, and Leibniz generally align with a tradition of transcendental realism (a higher world of truth), it is important to note that Aristotle rejected the separation of Plato's *theory of the forms* from matter, and Hegel's idealism is different in some ways as well.
- 2) In Egyptian mythology, *Ma'at* is the concept of truth, balance, and order. It is sometimes symbolized by a feather or associated with a mirror of the soul. Hence, calling it a "divine mirror" is a metaphorical interpretation rather than its standard definition.
- 3) *Teotl* is Nahuatl (Aztec), and is often interpreted as a dynamic, immanent, and all-encompassing energy or force, rather than an abstract, static, "higher" static reality.